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ABSTRACT

Only about 9% of the eligible American population actually donates blood, and the rate of donors who fail to give a second time is very high. Since many people who view blood-giving as a humanitarian act also see it as an unpleasant experience, persuasive appeals that promote a sense of moral obligation may be ineffectual in prompting donations. A study was conducted in which subjects were exposed to no message or to one of three persuasive messages that either highlighted moral reasons for donating blood, counterargued fears associated with donating blood, or used a combination of both these modes. Male and female college students listened to prerecorded messages and then completed a series of nine-point scales on attitudes toward the consequences of the act and attitude toward the act itself, and attendance rates for members of the various groups at a campus blood drive were recorded. Individuals in the moral message condition indicated the most favorable post-message attitude toward the consequence of donating blood and felt a strong moral obligation to donate. However, combined message condition individuals indicated the greatest post-message intent to donate. (DF)

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Effects of Persuasive Messages on Blood Donation Attitudes, Intentions, and Behavior

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, (March 22-24, 1985), Boston, MA. Request for a detailed summary of this study may be obtained from the first author at Mohawk Valley Community College, Department of Psychology- 1101 Sherman Drive, Utica, NY 13501.

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(1) Title of Paper: Effects of Persuasive Messages on Blood Donation Attitudes, Intentions, and Behavior

(2) Topical Session Preference: Attitude Change, Helping Behavior, Moral Behavior

(3) Problem:

Only 8-9% of the eligible American population actually donates blood (Oswalt, 1979), and the rate of donors who fail to give a second time is regrettably high (Burnett, 1981). Ironically, while nondonors judge the act itself to be painful and unpleasant (Pomazal & Jaccard, 1976) they consider donating blood to be a humanitarian act (Burnett, 1982; Oswalt, 1977).

A decision making model in which personal norms mediate altruistic acts has been proposed by Schwartz (1977). Supposedly, the activation of internalized norms generate feelings of obligation which, in turn, influence the tendency to engage in altruistic behavior such as helping handicapped individuals and donating bone marrow (see Schwartz, 1981). Based on this model, if moral obligations are made salient to the individual, the tendency to donate blood should increase since it is considered an altruistic act.

Since many people perceive blood-giving as an aversive experience (Oswalt, 1977), persuasive appeals that activate a sense of moral obligation may still be ineffectual in prompting donations. People may be persuaded to have more positive attitudes toward the morally-satisfying consequences of the act but fear the act itself. Attitude toward the act itself is a better

predictor of behavioral intent (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) than attitude toward consequences, and so must be "worked on" by a persuasive appeal. Thus, while a message that appeals to helping norms may maximize favorability of attitude toward the consequences ("good feelings") of blood-giving, a message that also attempts to refuce fear (cf., Leventhal, 1970) may have the strongest effects on behavioral intent and behavior.

(4) & (5) Subjects and Procedure:

Male and female students (n = 21 per condition) participating for course credit were exposed to no message or one of three persuasive messages that either highlighted moral reasons for donating blood, counterargued fears associated with donating blood, or both. Each message was prerecorded by a female college student, was 3½-4 minutes in length, and contained 550- 580 words comprising six arguments advocating donating at an upcoming blood drive. Subjects participated in groups of 2-6. Following the message (or immediately after preliminary demographic measures), the experimenter distributed a series of 9-point scales (1 = low value; 9 = high value) on attitudes toward the consequence of the act ("Donating blood at the upcoming blood drive would give me a good feeling" and "...a feeling of self-satisfaction") and attitude toward the act itself (bi-polar scales: "bad-good", "unpleasant-pleasant", "awful-nice", "disagreeable-agreeable"). Also, a 9-point perceived message validity scale was distributed (1 = completely invalid; 9 = completely valid). After these were completed and collected, subjects indicated how morally obligated they felt to donate blood (1 = no obligation; 9 = very strong obligation) and their intentions (1 = no intent;

9 = very likely intend) to do so. Participants then were told that the study was over. However, before debriefing, the experimenter stated that since there presently was a campus blood drive, students involved in the drive had asked if participants could have the opportunity to complete a donor pledge card (a second intent measure). The card was similar to those used by the Red Cross, requesting an individual's name and an appointment date. Subjects were assured they were under no obligation to pledge. After the cards were collected, subjects were debriefed.

On the day of the drive, attendance rates of participants were recorded by the experimenter and attendees were debriefed.

(6) Results:

Analysis of variance was performed on all measures. There were no differences across message conditions on the validity scale (overall $\underline{M}$ = 7.94). However, moral message condition subjects indicated a greater expectation of self-satisfaction ($\underline{M}$ = 7.95) compared to subjects in the fear ($\underline{M}$ = 7.14), combined ($\underline{M}$ = 6.71), or no message ($\underline{M}$ = 7.00) conditions (overall $\underline{F}$ (3,80) = 4.459, $\underline{p} < .006$; moral message vs. other two message conditions: $\underline{t}$ (61) = 2.37, $\underline{p} < .02$). An overall index of attitude toward the consequence of donating was computed for each subject by summing the scores on both attitude toward consequence measures. Moral message condition subjects expressed more favorable attitudes toward consequences ($\underline{M}$ = 15.95) compared to subjects in the fear ($\underline{M}$ = 14.43), combined ($\underline{M}$ = 14.14), and no message ($\underline{M}$ = 13.19) conditions (overall $\underline{F}$ (3,80) = 3.579, $\underline{p} < .017$; moral message vs. other two message contions: $\underline{t}$ (61) = 2.248,

$p. < .027$). Subjects in the moral message condition also reported the greatest sense of moral obligation ($M = 6.52$) compared to subjects in the fear ($M = 5.48$), combined ($M = 5.86$) and no message ($M = 4.10$) conditions, $F\ (3,80) = 6.37$, $p. < .001$. To assess attitude toward the act itself, a total rating score was computed by summing across the four bi-polar scales. On this overall act attitude measure, the combined message condition subjects indicated the most favorable attitude ($M = 30.33$ versus 28.24, 23.81, and 25.67 in the moral, fear, and no message conditions, respectively), $F\ (3,80) = 3.481$, $p. < .02$.

On the second intent measure (the pledge card) subjects in the combined condition were most likely to state an intention (66.7%) compared to moral (28.6%), fear (38.1%), and no message (23.8%) condition subjects (overall $\chi^2\ (3) = 9.73$, $p. < .021$; combined message vs. other two message conditions: $\chi^2\ (1) = 9.33$, $p. < .009$. There were no differences in actual attendance, possibly because poor weather conditions the day of the drive kept the vast majority of students away from school.

Partial correlations were computed across dependent measures for all subjects. Table 1 indicates that moral obligation alone was not a significant predictor of either measure of behavioral intent nor of behavior (all $rs < .02$), while signing the intent card was a significant predictor of actual behavior. In addition, a multiple regression analysis of variables contributing to the prediction of behavioral intent and behavior was computed across all subjects. Table 2 indicates that attitude toward consequence was a significant predictor of intent and

behavior, and that the attitude toward the act itself was a significant predictor of intent. Behavior intent measures alone were a significant predictor of behavior. Moral obligation, however, added little to the prediction of behavior intent and behavior beyond the contributions of attitude and intent.

(7) Implications and Conclusions:

These results suggest that different messages have different effects on the attitudes, behavioral intentions, moral obligations, and behavior of participants in an altruistic but aversive situation: blood donating. Individuals in the moral message condition indicated the most favorable post-message attitude toward the consequence of donating blood and felt a strong moral obligation to donate. However, combined message condition individuals indicated the greatest post-message intent to donate. Thus, as predicted, it took a persuasive message that both heightened the morally-relevant aspects associated with performing a behavior and reduced the fear-relevant aspects associated with the act itself to enhance at least a commitment to perform the act. Consistent with this, partial correlations and multiple regression analysis indicated that personal norms as expressed by moral obligation (Schwartz, 1977;1981) was not a predictor of behavioral intent or behavior. The best single predictor of intent and behavior, consistent with Ajzen and Fishbein's (1977) view, was attitudes and intent, respectively. However, since moral obligation was assessed on a single 9-point scale it is unclear whether or not personal norms are an important determinent of this altruistic albeit aversive act. Nevertheless, it seems that in this study, personal norms did not play a causal role in predicting intent or behavior.

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Table 1

Partial Correlations Among Dependent Variables (N = 84)

Variables	Total Aconseq	Total Aact	M.O.	Blac	Bled	Beh
Total Aconseq	----					
Total Aact	.419	----				
M.O.	.294	.112	----			
Blac	.468	.131	.172	----		
Bled	-.089	.217	.011	.525	----	
Beh	-.018	.214	.028	.079	.355	----

Note. Abbreviations are as follows: Total Aconseq = total score index based on both Aconseq measures; Total Aact = total score index based on all four Aact measures; M.O. = moral obligation; Blac = behavioral intent scale; Bled = behavioral intent pledge card; Beh = behavior. Significance levels are as follows: $r \geq .35$, $p < .001$; $r \geq .29$, $p < .01$; $r \geq .21$, $p < .05$.

Table 2

Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Contributing to Behavioral Intent and Behavior Among All Subjects (N = 84)

Variables	BEHAVIORAL INTENT: Scale			BEHAVIORAL INTENT: Card		
	Multiple R	Cum. Var.	Simple r	Multiple R	Cum. Var.	Simple r
Aconseq	.605***	.37	.605	.336**	.11	.336
+ M.O.	.633***	.40	.343	.356*	.13	.042
Aact	.387*	.15	.342	.392*	.15	.338
+ M.O.	.458*	.21	.343	.409	.17	.042
Aconseq	.605***	.37	.605	.336**	.11	.336
+ Aact	.634**	.40	.342	.439*	.19	.338

Variables	BEHAVIOR: Multiple R	Cum. Var.	Simple r
Aconseq	.271*	.07	.271
+ BI	.523*	.27	.515
Aconseq	.271*	.07	.271
+ M.O.	.279	.08	.120
Aact	.344	.12	.344
+ BI	.560	.32	.515
Aact	.344	.12	.344
+ M.O.	.349	.12	.120
BI	.515***	.27	.515
+ M.O.	.515***	.27	.120

Note. Abbreviations are as follows: Cum. Var. = cumulative variance; Aconseq = attitude toward the consequence of the act; Aact = attitude toward the act itself; M.O. = moral obligation; BI = behavioral intent.
Significance levels: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$.